



Climate change policy and policy change in China

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Abstract:

Solving the climate change problem by limiting global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions will necessitate action by the world's two largest emitters, the United States and China. Neither has so far committed to quantitative emissions limits. Some argue that China cannot be engaged on the basis of its national interest in climate policy, on the ground that China's national net benefits of limiting greenhouse gas emissions would be negative, as a result of significant GHG abatement costs and potential net gains to China from a warmer world. This premise has led some observers to advocate other approaches to engaging China, such as appeal to moral obligation. This Article argues that appeal to national net benefits is still the best approach to engage China. First, appealing to China's asserted moral obligation to limit its GHG emissions may be ineffective or even counterproductive. Even if climate change is a moral issue for American leaders, framing the issue that way may not be persuasive to Chinese leaders. Second, the concern that China's national net benefits of climate policy are negative is based on older forecasts of costs and benefits. More recent climate science, of which the Chinese leadership is aware, indicates higher damages to China from climate change and thus greater net benefits to China from climate policy. Third, the public health co-benefits of reducing other air pollutants along with GHGs may make GHG emissions limits look more attractive to China. Fourth, the distribution of climate impacts within China may be as important as the net aggregate: climate change may exacerbate political and social stresses within China, which the leadership may seek to avoid in order to maintain political stability. Fifth, the costs of abatement may decline as innovation in China accelerates. Sixth, as China becomes a great power in world politics, and as climate change affects China's allies, leadership on climate policy may look more favorable to China's elites. Seventh, the design of the international climate treaty regime itself can offer positive incentives to China. Taken together, these factors point to a potential and even ongoing shift in Chinese climate policy. They illustrate how the international law and politics of climate change depend on domestic politics and institutions. and they suggest that the United States, if it too takes effective action, can make the case for enlightened pragmatism as a basis to engage China in a cooperative global climate policy regime.

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Resource Description

Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Unspecified Exposure

Geographic Feature:

Climate Change and Human Health Literature Portal

resource focuses on specific type of geography

None or Unspecified

Geographic Location:

resource focuses on specific location

Non-United States

Non-United States: Asia

Asian Region/Country: China

Health Co-Benefit/Co-Harm (Adaption/Mitigation):

specification of beneficial or harmful impacts to health resulting from efforts to reduce or cope with greenhouse gases

A focus of content

Health Impact:

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Health Outcome Unspecified

Intervention:

strategy to prepare for or reduce the impact of climate change on health

A focus of content

Mitigation/Adaptation:

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Mitigation

Model/Methodology:

type of model used or methodology development is a focus of resource

Cost/Economic, Other Projection Model/Methodology

Other Projection Model/Methodology: discussion only

Resource Type:

format or standard characteristic of resource

Policy/Opinion

Timescale:

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified